

INDOT Offers 3D Tour of Historic Circus Property

Symbolically, it was the elephant in the room: What could INDOT do to help mitigate the demolition of two historic but dilapidated circus barns off U.S. 31 near Peru in Miami County?

Part of that question has now been answered: We helped develop a 3D virtual tour of the historic property, officially called the Terrell Jacobs Circus Winter Quarters.

As part of an effort to turn U.S. 31 into a free-flow highway, we purchased the land that includes the quarters' two remaining crumbling barns, which are on the National Register of Historic Places. Later this fall or winter, they will be demolished, along with the other buildings on the property.

But INDOT is stepping up to help mitigate the loss. We have pledged \$40,000 in matching funds to replace the roof of the International Circus Hall of Fame in Peru. The roof replacement will occur later; in the meantime, we have already helped in another way: In May, we unveiled the 3D virtual tour of the property.



The Elephant Barn and Cat Barn are two high-profile structures at the historic Terrell Jacobs Circus Winter Quarters, located off U.S. 31 in Miami County.

“As part of the certificate of approval from the Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology to demolish these two structures of the circus winter quarters, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, we worked with consultants to develop a 3D tour of the historic property,” said Cultural

Resources Office Specialist Patrick Carpenter. “The 3D virtual tour is a robust collection and features many different options to discover the property, including maps, photographs, and walking tours.”

The Terrell Jacobs Circus was once famous. Jacobs was a “tiger king” well before 2020’s version of Joe Exotic. Actually, he was known as the “lion king,” and those words are inscribed on his tombstone at Falls Cemetery in Wabash. In the 1930s, he set a U.S. record for taming 52 lions, tigers, and leopards in one arena. After working for Ringling Bros./Barnum & Bailey, he started his own short-lived circus in Peru in 1940. Eventually, his property contained an elephant barn, cat barn, slaughterhouse, bunkhouse for staff, a cook’s shed, and an octagonal diner with a striped roof to suggest the appearance of a circus tent.

Today, all the buildings remain in various stages of disrepair. The elephant and cat barns are the most prominent. The U-shaped elephant barn housed six elephants; the cat barn included lion, tiger, leopard and monkey cages lining the walls, some of which were painted with a circus theme. In the

1950s, the property changed hands and continued to host circus acts for 20 years. In the 1970s, the venue closed, with artifacts and memorabilia auctioned off.

The property achieved National Register status in 2010, making it eligible for historic rehabilitation tax credits to attract a buyer who could revive the property. But no buyer came forward. In the meantime, both buildings have deteriorated. A portion of the elephant barn's roof has collapsed, and vandals have damaged the cat barn.

The 3D virtual tour includes dozens of photos and maps. The highlights, though, are the [overall grounds walking tour](#), and the [walking tour inside and outside the cat barn](#). **Note:** In both walking tours, click on the yellow dots only.

These tours feature clear, detailed images that the user can control for a 360-degree look with the ability to pan up and down. The overall grounds walking tour includes 43 vantage points; the cat barn tour includes 360-degree looks from four spots within the barn and one outside the barn. For best results, users are asked to use the Google Chrome or Microsoft Edge browsers.



Terrell Jacobs “tames” a leopard and poses with a lion (two left photos). The 3D virtual tour of the Terrell Jacobs Circus Winter Quarters grounds includes a walking tour of the inside of the Cat Barn (two top photos), with remains of an area that once housed lions, tigers, leopards, and monkeys.